

What is effective communication?

Effective communication is a two-way process, where each person takes responsibility for their own part. When people communicate effectively, it helps them feel more comfortable in talking about important information, sharing concerns or asking for help. Common topics families and early childhood staff might communicate about include:

- ▶ sharing developmental milestones or children's achievements
- ▶ sharing concerns about children's wellbeing or behaviour
- ▶ talking about any relevant information relating to major family events or changes
- ▶ sharing early childhood development and parenting knowledge
- ▶ talking about children's friendships and play
- ▶ talking about any changes within a service that might impact on children
- ▶ keeping each other aware of any community activities or resources.





Eda's story



Martin, father of four-year-old Eda decided to approach Lin, a staff member at Eda's early childhood service, to talk about how his separation from his wife may be affecting Eda.

Martin: Hi Lin, have you got a second to talk about Eda?

Lin: Sure Martin, what's going on?

Martin: I'm not sure if you know, but her mother and I have recently separated. At first Eda seemed ok, but now she seems more affected. I don't really know how to handle it, and thought you might have some ideas.

Lin: Thanks for coming to talk to me, Martin. It's really helpful to know what's happening at home and how that might affect Eda at the service. What's worrying you exactly about Eda?

Martin: Well, during the separation she seemed ok. But she's been having a lot of tantrums, yelling and throwing her toys around more recently. Even during everyday things like coming to dinner and having her bath.

Lin: You're worried about the change in Eda's behaviour and that she seems to be overreacting to things that are part of her usual day. Is there anything else you are concerned about?

Martin: I guess I just want her to be happy and not so angry. I need to know how to handle all of this.

Lin: I'm sure we can work this out together Martin. Would it be possible for you to come in on Friday afternoon to talk more?

Martin: Yes, I could do that.

Lin: Great. In the meantime, I'm going to have a chat with some of the other staff here, and find out if they've also noticed any behaviour changes in Eda. That way we'll have information from everyone.

Communication is a dance involving two or more people in which ideas are conveyed, shared, listened to, and built upon.¹

¹Keyser, J. (2006). *From parents to partners: Building a family-centred early childhood program*. Washington: The National Association for the Education of Young Children, p. 27.

Why is effective communication important?

When people communicate effectively, they are able to talk openly about what is on their mind and develop a shared understanding. Effective communication helps families and staff to share important and relevant information about children. For example, when families talk to staff about their lives, staff start to know more about what is going on for children outside the early childhood service and thus work more effectively with children and their families.

Effective communication helps build partnerships between families and early childhood staff. When families and staff exchange information about children's interests, family background and daily experiences, it helps to develop a common understanding about the child. For more information on forming partnerships, refer to *Component 3: Working with parents and carers 'Building partnerships between families and early childhood staff'*.

Effective communication is helpful to:

- ▶ build relationships between families and early childhood services
- ▶ share important information about children
- ▶ develop an understanding across home and the early childhood service for both families and staff
- ▶ support children's social and emotional wellbeing and development.



Some hints for effective communication

Effective communication requires adaptability and flexibility.

Some hints for effective communication include:

- ▶ Be attentive.
- ▶ Listen carefully.
- ▶ Be aware of a person's facial expressions, tone of voice and body language, to get an idea of how they are feeling.
- ▶ Ask questions and restate what the speaker has said to check that you have accurately understood the information.
- ▶ Use non-blaming and 'I' statements to help clarify your point of view. For example, 'I do feel worried when I see that Tyson is starting to get angry.'
- ▶ Describe clearly and honestly what you would like to talk about. Try to use specific examples if you can.
- ▶ Try to understand the other person's point of view and don't jump to conclusions.
- ▶ Be aware of how differences in upbringing, family values, culture, strengths and interests, and experiences can mean that people have different points of view.
- ▶ Be flexible in communicating in different ways, for example, face-to-face, email, telephone.
- ▶ Consider whether the communication needs further follow-up and try to arrange a time to do so.



This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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